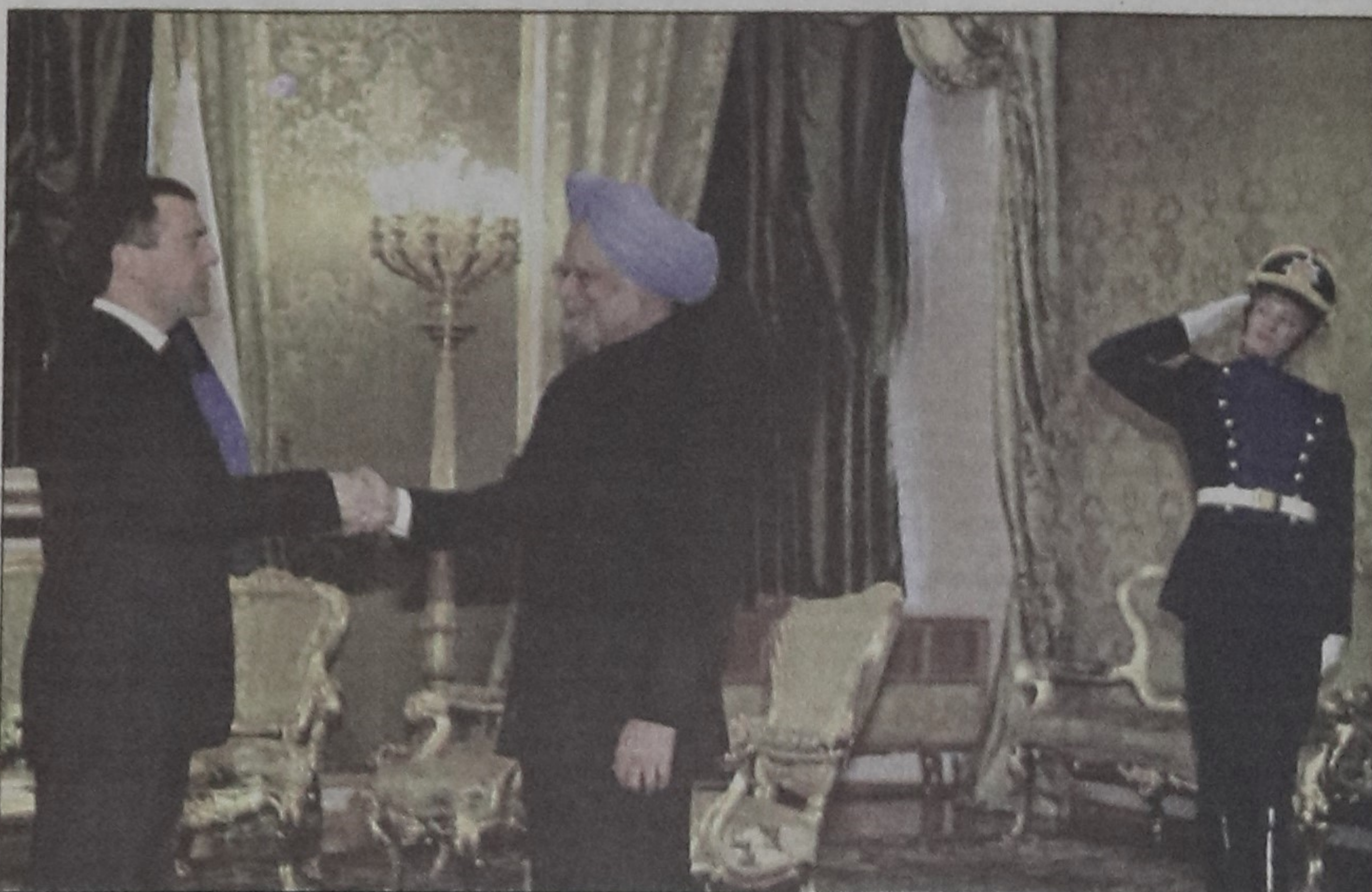


MANMOHAN'S VISIT TO MOSCOW

Indo-Russian partnership grows stronger



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

ON 6th December, the Indian Prime Minister paid a three-day visit to Russia for the Annual Summit Meeting with the Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev.

It was Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's second visit to Russia this year. He visited Yekaterinburg in the Russian Federation in June for his first visit abroad after the formation of the new government to participate in the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) and SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) Summits. They also met in September at the G20 summit in Pittsburgh.

During the visit, the key points of his discussion with the Russian President were reportedly cooperation in areas of defence, civil nuclear energy, space, science and technology, hydrocarbon, the pharmaceutical industry and biotechnology.

Earlier, in a departure statement issued before leaving for Moscow, Dr. Singh said: "The Annual Summit is the principal mechanism for the advancement of our strategic partnership with Russia. This is a partnership based on the solid foundation of long-standing friendship, deep mutual trust and strong convergence of interests. Over the years, our multifaceted cooperation with Russia has acquired greater depth and maturity through joint efforts. We seek to strengthen these ties further."

Summit meetings always provide new impulse and momentum to the existing ties as well as an opportunity to revisit and rediscover the potential for furthering mutually beneficial cooperation.

Medvedev and Manmohan Singh presided over the signing of intergovernmental agreements on the 2011-2020 military technical cooperation programme and post-sales service and maintenance of arms and military equipment supplied to India, and also a protocol to the intergovernmental agreement on cooperation in developing and manufacturing a multipurpose transport plane. An agreement between the Russian and Indian governments on cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy was initiated.

The joint declaration on deepening the two countries' strategic partnership with the aim of countering global challenges was adopted at the conclusion of the talks. This document assesses the importance of the Russian-Indian strategic partnership and sets out a common vision on establishing a polycentric international system for the twenty-first century.

Indo-Russian relationship

Indian ties with the Russian Federation are historic, close and uniquely enduring. During the Cold War era, India and Soviet Union was linked through a Friendship Treaty of August 1971, although India professed non-alignment as a component of its foreign policy. These ties are based on a strong national consensus in both countries that has cut across ideologies and

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The bilateral relationship had been re-energized with the declaration of a Strategic Partnership between the two countries during the visit to India in 2000 by the then President Putin.

"Since then, our partnership has diversified enormously and you can see that today the relationship is a uniquely strong and expanding one, particularly in the fields of defence, nuclear energy, hydrocarbons, space research and science and technology," said Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao.

Beginning with the State visit of President Patil in September 2009, India's Commerce and Industry Minister, Anand Sharma, Defence Minister A.K. Antony and External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna visited the Russian Federation in the months of October and November 2009, when diverse aspects of the bilateral relationship have been reviewed and the path ahead has been charted out, the Indian Foreign Secretary informed.

Why the visit?

The visit to Moscow, according to many analysts, may be perceived in the context of the visit to Washington of India's Prime Minister at the end of November this year.

Furthermore, the visit to Washington was clouded by President Obama's visit to China. Obama's tone of speech in China created an impression in India that the US worries more about offending China than standing up for the values it shares with India.

President Obama's "deferential" statements during his visit to China have raised questions about India's relationship with the US. Indian media reports say that the President has gone out of the way to present a kinder and gentler image of America, reassuring China that America does not seek to contain the rising economic giant.

Indians are angered over the perception that Obama

neglected India during his recent trip to Asia and seemed to endorse a stronger role for China in India's sensitive dealings with Pakistan.

"There's a certain amount of Bush nostalgia," said Teresita Schaffer, a former State Department South Asia specialist and US Ambassador to Sri Lanka. She said, "While Bush was seen as having an emotional and ideological connection to the country, Obama's connection is seen as cerebral and as being eroded by domestic problems and by the focus on Afghanistan and Pakistan."

Observers say that Obama has taken a strategic view: the China-Pakistan axis is more important to American interests in Afghanistan and Iran than India. It was a calculated move as Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Vice President Joe Biden and others have targeted Pakistan and China for numerous visits this year, while basically ignoring India.

Obama has also put more pressure on India than they would like. He lectured India about making greater concessions in Kashmir just weeks before Pakistani terrorists attacked Mumbai.

Furthermore, in April this year, President Obama vowed that the United States will take concrete steps toward a world free of nuclear weapons. To reduce US warheads and stockpiles, his administration will negotiate a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with the Russians this year.

"To achieve a global ban on nuclear testing, my administration will immediately and aggressively pursue US ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). After more than five decades of talks, it is time for the testing of nuclear weapons to finally be banned," Obama said.

Obama expected India to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty and CTBT but India's Prime Minister was reportedly reluctant to commit to do so.

Against the background, it was reported that Dr. Singh failed in the main objective of his visit - to "operationalise" the nuclear deal concluded in the Bush era. While Obama pledged to "fully implement" the agreement, potentially crucial details of nuclear technology transfers to India have not been finalised.

Brahma Chellaney, a professor of strategic studies at the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi summed up the visit: "In a nutshell, Singh got a nice state ceremony, China got respect as an equal and Pakistan has got billions of dollars of additional US aid. India will have to be satisfied with the sumptuous dinner."

Many analysts say that India's Prime Minister's visit is to achieve what he failed to get from the Obama administration on nuclear and defence deals.

Carnegie Moscow Center expert Peter Topychkanov notes that to "the extent that Russian and Indian leaders exchange visits each year, Manmohan Singh's trip is somewhat routine. That said, though, these visits have not always led to the development of real agreements. This year, however, the visit of the Prime Minister of India was filled with real agreements in the area of military-technical cooperation, including cooperation on the development of a multipurpose transport plane, as well as cooperation in the peaceful use of atomic energy."

The author is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

NEWS BRIEFS

Medvedev, Obama discuss deal to cut nukes

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and his U.S. counterpart Barack Obama on December 13 held talks by phone to discuss a new accord on cutting nuclear arsenals, the Kremlin said in a statement.

Media reports have said they expect the two presidents to sign the successor to the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which expired on December 5, in a European capital next week.

"The presidents had an exchange of opinions ... concerning the results and perspectives of work on this important document for the strategic stability of the world," the statement said.

Medvedev and Obama stressed the "intensive character" of the work of Russian and U.S. delegations in Geneva which "allow us to talk of considerable progress in the negotiation process".

"The two heads of state agreed on asking [the delegations] to actively pursue work ... in order to reach definitive agreements on all issues," the statement added.

The new agreement on which the delegations have been working for more than six months in Geneva is due to take over from START I.

Medvedev will travel to Copenhagen for the final stages of the U.N. Climate talks on December 17 and 18. Obama is also expected in the Danish capital on December 18 for the end of the conference.

Medvedev and Obama in July set a goal of slashing the number of warheads on either side to between 1,500 and 1,675 and the number of "carriers" capable of delivering them to between 500 and 1,100.

Source: www.defensenews.com

Mullen raises Balochistan issue with India

US Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen said he has raised the issue of interference into Balochistan with the Indian leadership. Talking to a private TV channel, Mullen said he talked to his Indian counterparts, both former and current, and the Indian political leadership about Pakistan's reservations.

He said he had also discussed the issue with Pakistan Army Chief General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was involved in the killings of US citizens, Mullen said adding that Al Qaeda-Taliban collaboration in the Pak-Afghan border area had spurred violence in both countries. The US Army chief said Pak Army has taken up vital measures to cope with the extremists and clinched successes, adding the relations between Pakistan and the US are based on mutual interests.

He also said if Indo-Pak tension is terminated and headway towards the resolution of Kashmir issue is achieved, then the issue regarding the regional stability to a large extent would be resolved. Mullen ruled out putting any US troops on Pakistani soil for anti-militant operations along the Afghan border and said a stable and supportive Kabul would help Islamabad in formulating its future strategy. "No, no. There's no absolutely no provision, nor or no discussion of putting any US troops in Pakistan," he told the PBS channel when asked if the US troops could target terrorists on the Pakistani side of the Afghan border.

Source: www.defence.pk

Opportune time for Delhi-Dhaka ties

WASBIR HUSSAIN

YEAR 2009 is not 1971. If India should not take Bangladesh for granted just because it helped the nation attain independence some forty years ago, Dhaka also cannot afford to ignore the facts of history and say today that New Delhi has done precious little for it. We cannot do away with either history or geography in so far as India and Bangladesh are concerned, and, therefore, the best way to move forward is to take pragmatic steps, taking into account the geo-politics and market forces. The question to ask at this juncture is whether the two prime ministers, Manmohan Singh and Sheikh Hasina, can manage to remove the trust deficit between the two South Asian neighbours and take Indo-Bangladesh relations to a real high. This question is more than valid because trust deficit between New Delhi and Dhaka is the main reason for the blow-hot-blow-cold relationship between these two most populous neighbours.

Today, as Bangladesh premier Hasina is set to embark on a visit to India, one cannot but monitor more closely the signals emanating from Dhaka, and, I must say, these signals are encouraging. After all, if economic concerns top Bangladesh's agenda in so far as India is concerned, it is the issue of security that bothers New Delhi the most. During the past six weeks, India has seen things that it has been waiting to see for a decade now. Yes, one is talking about action (although not openly admitted) taken by authorities in Bangladesh to corner Northeast Indian separatist leaders. The manner in which Sasadhar Choudhury, the self-styled foreign secretary of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), and the group's finance secretary Chitrabon Hazarika, have landed in the hands of Indian authorities on the border with Bangladesh in November clearly indicates a helping hand lent by Dhaka. Again, the dramatic manner in which ULFA's topmost leader, Chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa, surfaced in India on December 3, right on the border with Bangladesh, along with the rebel group's deputy commander-in-chief Raju Baruah, also points to close assistance from Dhaka.

For us in India, it is only natural to expect the Awami League regime to clamp down on terror. After all, immediately after she led her party to a landslide victory in December 2008, even before she took over as prime minister, Sheikh Hasina had talked of not allowing any anti-India activity from Bangladesh soil. She had also spoken of setting up a regional task force to combat terrorism in South Asia. And her government demonstrated that it meant business when it put the 2004 Chittagong arms haul case on fast track, leading to the arrest of two former chiefs of Bangladesh's premier intelligence agency, and the naming of ULFA's elusive military chief Paresh Baruah in the case. It is said that the ten truck loads of arms and ammunition that were offloaded at the jetty in Chittagong was meant for the ULFA in Assam and the size of the consignment was large enough to arm an army brigade. If Dhaka, today, is acting against the ULFA or other Northeast Indian rebels it is an extension of its

This is an opportune time for the Awami League to be open about its equations with India considering the massive mandate the party has got at the last elections. The mandate can only be seen as a verdict against terror or fundamentalism and a verdict in favour of peace and development. India must address Bangladesh's concern over the issue of trade deficit and non-tariff barriers. But issues like trade or tariff as well as the enclave issue can only be resolved if there is a strong political will.

clampdown on terror in general. That includes both homegrown and global Islamist terror and left-wing extremism.

What puzzles many in India is Dhaka's reluctance to admit its role in helping New Delhi get custody of rebel leaders like Rajkhowa and others who have been on the run for nearly two decades now. It is clear that Dhaka has been cooperating with New Delhi by launching a crackdown on the ULFA and other Northeast Indian insurgents, but why cooperate in secret is the question being asked. I have just returned from a visit to Bangladesh, having taken part in a Bangladesh-India Dialogue initiated by a leading think-tank in Dhaka, the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI). One of Bangladesh's former Ambassadors had this to tell me: "India has embarrassed us by flashing the news of Arabinda Rajkhowa's arrest. You want our help and when we help you, you disclose things to the media..." This remark perhaps is in sync with Dhaka's strategy of cooperating with India but not openly acknowledging it.

This is only part of the story though there has been a perceptible change in the policy towards the issue of Northeast Indian rebels after the advent of the Awami League in the corridors of power in Dhaka. Contrary to the government's position under the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the Awami League government



does not flatly deny that ULFA leaders are present or were present in Bangladesh. But Sheikh Hasina's party or government is just not ready to go to the people on this perhaps because the party could run the risk of being projected as a 'stooge of India.' Anti-India rhetoric still cuts ice among vast sections of people in Bangladesh's murky political landscape, and, therefore, the Awami League is treading cautiously although the party seems set on improving ties with India.

I heard a very interesting coinage this time used by some members of the Bangladeshi strategic community: they are talking about 'regime compatibility', referring to the equations between the Awami League and the ruling Congress in India. One has to wait and see if the Awami League is willing to admit any 'regime compatibility' with the Congress party and prepare the ground for an improved or lasting relationship between the two nations. This is an opportune time for the Awami League to be open about its equations with India considering the massive mandate the party has got at the last elections. The mandate can only be seen as a verdict against terror or fundamentalism and a verdict in favour of peace and development. The voters' behaviour has lots in common with the behaviour of the electorate in India vote against communalism, fundamentalism and a vote for peace, security and progress.

In this whole expectation of an improved Indo-Bangladesh relation, New Delhi has a key role to play. India must address Bangladesh's concern over the issue of trade deficit and non-tariff barriers. But issues like trade or tariff as

well as the enclave issue can only be resolved if there is a strong political will. In fact I would argue that the issue of enclaves should not be allowed to be confused with the issue of illegal migration. Border guards on both sides must actually resort to firing at people only as a last resort. Both nations must jointly clamp down on terror; there should be an extradition treaty in place and if this turns out to be too complicated, the two nations must gather the courage to use the option of deporting unwanted non-nationals. As Bangladesh's Foreign Minister Dr Dipu Moni said in Dhaka recently, "India and Bangladesh today stand at a moment of opportunity. We are aware of our secular and pluralist heritage and we are confident of resolving our problems." This is the mood that is required to improve ties between the two countries.

I got a sense of just that mood, one of hope while in Dhaka. Over dinner at the Gulshan Club, Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Mohamed Mijarul Quayes regaled some thirty of us by singing not one, but two Tagore songs. Quayes just needed a mild prodding from one of his predecessors Farooq Sobhan to break into song. An eloquent speaker, Quayes I was told is a 1982 batch Foreign Service officer and is just about 49, quite young to hold the coveted job in any country. Bangladesh is young, its democracy is young and there is no reason why the two neighbours cannot work out a win-win relationship.

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